In the late twentieth century, the number of immigrants in the United States hit an all time high. Large numbers of non-European immigrants changed the ethnic composition of the United States. Immigration—legal and illegal—emerged as a difficult political issue.

After the introduction of the national origins quota system in the 1920s, the sources and character of immigration to the United States changed dramatically. For the next few decades, the total number of immigrants arriving annually remained markedly lower. The quota system which gave preference to immigrants from northern and western European countries, although occasionally modified by Congress, remained largely intact until 1965.

In the midst of the flurry of civil rights and antipoverty legislation of the mid-1960s, the Immigration Act of 1965 received scant attention when it was enacted. The law abolished the national origins quota system. It also gave preference to skilled persons and persons with close relatives who are U.S. citizens—policies which remain in place today. The preference given to the children, spouses, and parents of U.S. citizens meant that migration chains were established. As newcomers acquired U.S. citizenship, they too could send for relatives in their home country. Also, for the first time, the legislation introduced limits on immigration from the Western Hemisphere. The act further provided that immigrants could apply for U.S. citizenship after five years of legal residency.

At the time of its passage, few people expected that the new law would radically change the pattern or volume of immigration to the United States. Supporters of the law presented it as an extension of America’s growing commitment to equal rights for non-European peoples. As U.S. Representative Philip Burton of California stated, “Just as we sought to eliminate discrimination in our land through the Civil Rights Act, today we seek by phasing out the national origins quota system to eliminate discrimination in immigration to this nation composed of the descendants of immigrants.”

Supporters of the new law also assumed that the new equal quotas
for non-European nations would generally go unfilled. In fact, immigration from non-European countries soared in subsequent decades.

In addition to those arriving through traditional immigration channels, some newcomers arrived in the United States as refugees. Beginning in 1948, refugees from countries ravaged by World War II were admitted, although they were counted as part of their nation’s quota. The Cold War led to another class of refugees. According to the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, anyone who was fleeing a Communist regime could be admitted as a refugee. Refugee policy was further broadened under the Refugee Act of 1980, which defined a refugee as someone leaving his or her country due to a “well founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group, or political opinion.”

The growing problem of illegal immigration also prompted changes in immigration law. During the Reagan administration, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This law established penalties for employers who knowingly hire unauthorized immigrants and strengthened border controls to prevent illegal entry into the United States. It also established a process to grant amnesty (in other words, a pardon) and legal papers to any undocumented alien who could prove that he or she had entered the country before January 1, 1982, and had resided in the United States since then.

Despite these changes, illegal immigration persisted and the number of unauthorized immigrants continued to grow. By 1990, an estimated 3.5 million unauthorized immigrants resided in the United States. By the mid-1990s, Congress was debating new ways to combat illegal immigration.
The law that resulted from these debates was the **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996**, which made several changes to U.S. immigration law. First, it required families sponsoring an immigrant to have an income above the poverty level. Second, it **allocated** more resources to stop illegal immigration, by authorizing an additional 5,000 Border Patrol agents and calling for the construction of a 14-mile fence along the border near San Diego. Third, the law toughened penalties for smuggling people or providing fraudulent documents. Finally, the law made it easier for immigration authorities to deport undocumented aliens.

Another change in immigration law was spurred by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 put immigration under the control of the newly created Department of Homeland Security. Furthermore, it tripled the number of Border Patrol agents, Customs Service inspectors, and Immigration and Naturalization Service inspectors along the Canadian border.

**Recent Immigration**

**MAIN Idea** In the late twentieth century, immigrants from Latin America and Asia outnumbered European immigrants.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Do you remember the reasons that some Americans objected to immigration in the late 1800s? Read on to learn how the debate resurfaced in the 1980s and continues today.

Although immigrants headed for all parts of the United States, certain states experienced a larger influx than others. In 1990, California, Texas, New York, Illinois, and Florida had the highest populations of foreign-born residents. High numbers of immigrants also increased the ethnic diversity of these states, as their Latino and Asian populations grew. Among the immigrants who arrived in the 1990s, just over 10 percent came from Europe. More than half of new immigrants came from Latin America, while approximately another 25 percent came from Asia. By 2001, the top five countries of origin for legal immigrants to the United States were Mexico, India, China, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

**Identifying** For what reasons may a foreigner be admitted to the United States as a refugee?

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**Securing the Border**

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, many Americans became increasingly concerned about border security. Many agreed on the need for increased border patrols. Others proposed building a continuous wall from Texas to California to prevent illegal immigration. Critics of such proposals, however, claimed such actions would not stop people who were determined to enter the country illegally, but rather force them to take more dangerous risks.

On May 27, 2006, a volunteer organization called the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps built a fence along the Mexican border on private property.

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**Analyzing VISUALS**

1. **Making Connections** Why do you think the organization pictured above decided to call themselves the “minutemen”?

2. **Theorizing** Do you think building a fence along the border would lead to fewer deaths? Why or why not?
Refugees added to the growing immigrant population. In the 25 years following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, more than 800,000 Cubans arrived in the United States. So many of these immigrants settled in the Miami, Florida, area that only the city of Havana, Cuba, is home to more Cubans. In addition, the Vietnam War created refugees. Some 600,000 immigrants from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia arrived in the decade after 1974.

In addition to the immigrants entering through legal channels, others arrived without official permission. The largest number of unauthorized immigrants came from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The Reagan administration’s amnesty program in 1986 had been designed to eliminate the problem of undocumented aliens, but over the next 20 years the number of unauthorized immigrants tripled. American public opinion divided over whether unauthorized immigrants should be able to obtain driver’s licenses or send their children to public schools and receive other government services. Some believed that unauthorized immigrants should be deported. Others favored allowing them to apply for temporary work visas so the government could keep track of them, and permitting them to earn permanent residence if they learned English, paid back taxes, and had no criminal record.

In 2006, President George W. Bush made immigration reform a top priority, but members of Congress strongly disagreed over how to solve the problem. A bipartisan majority of the Senate favored legislation that blended tougher enforcement of immigration laws with some form of earned citizenship for the estimated 12 million undocumented aliens living and working in the country. The Senate bill included a provision that undocumented aliens who grew up in the United States and graduated from high school could apply for citizenship. Conservative Republicans who held the majority in the House objected that this would reward illegal behavior. The House rejected any form of amnesty and called for the United States to build a wall along its Mexican border—although the United States had already tripled the size of its border patrol without reducing illegal immigration. As Congress debated a bill that would subject unauthorized aliens to criminal prosecution, Latinos held rallies across the country, carrying signs that read: “We are not criminals.”

Advocates of immigration reform promoted alternatives such as expanding quotas through a guest-worker program and establishing a means of legalization for those already in the country. Some undocumented aliens had lived in the United States for years, and had raised families here. Deporting them would mean separating husbands, wives, and children. Some undocumented aliens arrived as children and had lived in the United States most of their lives. Their own children, born in the United States, were native-born citizens even though their parents lacked legal status. Among those who became legal citizens, most wanted other family members to join them, so the reunification of families accounted for three-quarters of all legal immigration.

**Vocabulary**


**Main Ideas**

2. **Summarizing** What problems arose that caused changes in the immigration laws?

3. **Describing** What alternatives to immigration reform did advocates for reform suggest?

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Big Ideas** What two acts were instrumental in helping refugees?

5. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the immigration laws and what they intended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigration Law</th>
<th>Intent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Act of 1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. **Analyzing Visuals** Study the map on page 789. Research the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States and create a spreadsheet that lists the states where these immigrants settled and the estimated numbers in 2000 and 2005.

**Writing About History**

7. **Persuasive Writing** After reading about the problem of illegal immigration, write a letter to your representative in Congress explaining what you feel he or she should do about the problem.

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**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did some members of Congress oppose amnesty for undocumented aliens? Why did others support it?
Chapter 23  A Time of Change

The New Immigrants

In the decades since the Immigration Act of 1965 was enacted, the number of immigrants in the United States has risen dramatically. By 2000, immigrants comprised more than 10 percent of the population. The largest groups of these new immigrants came from Latin America and Asia. Immigration has become a topic of political debate. Should the U.S. make it easier to immigrate legally? Should the U.S. decrease the number of persons allowed to immigrate? How should unauthorized immigrants be treated?

Study these primary sources and answer the questions that follow.

Oral Interview

"On our third attempt, my wife, children, and I escaped by boat from Vietnam and arrived in Hong Kong, where we remained for three months. Then my brother, who came to America in 1975, sponsored us, and we arrived in America in 1978. . . .

Although in America we live with everything free, to move, to do business, we still have the need to return to Vietnam one day. This is our dream. In Vietnam, before the Communists came, we had a sentimental life, more [mentally] comfortable and cozy, more joyful. . . .

Here in America, we have all the material comforts, very good. But the joy and sentiment are not like we had in Vietnam. There, when we went out from the home, we laughed, we jumped. And we had many relatives and friends to come to see us at home. Here in America, I only know what goes on in my home; my neighbor knows only what goes on in his home. . . . In America, when we go to work, we go in our cars. When we return, we leave our cars and enter our homes [and do not meet neighbors]. We do not need to know what goes on in the houses of our neighbors. That’s why we do not have the kind of being at ease that we knew in Vietnam."

—Vietnamese immigrant

Oral Interview

"The buzzword is diversity. It’s on TV, politics, and this school [university], but then people like me are seen as foreigners and worse, illegals. The logic is if you look Mexican you are an immigrant, don’t speak English and are illegal. I get tired of saying that’s not me, oh well, except for the Mexican part. I don’t look at an Anglo with an Italian name and say, ‘Hey, do you speak Italian and when did you come to the United States?’"

—Diana, second-generation Mexican American

Photograph, c. 2006

▲ Tijuana (on the left) lies just south of San Diego; a fence marks the Mexico-U.S. border.

Photograph, 2006

▲ Jorge Urbina of Nicaragua and his brother Carlos take the oath of citizenship during a naturalization ceremony for 250 immigrants.
1. **Contrasting** How does the speaker in Source 1 contrast his life in America with his life in Vietnam?

2. **Describing** Study the photograph in Source 2. Write a description of the Mexican side of the border and a description of the U.S. side of the border.

3. **Analyzing** Examine Sources 3 and 4. How do they reflect the ethnicities of the new immigrants?

4. **Speculating** Study the photograph in Source 5. What might be some reasons that the woman opposes illegal immigration?

5. **Making Connections** According to the speaker in Source 6, why do so many people risk crossing the border illegally? What other illegal traffic occurs at the border?